

## Issues in Historic Preservation

### MAINTAINING A SENSE OF PLACE: COMMUNITY PRESERVATION IN GEORGIA

BY JOHN C. WATERS AND PRATT W. CASSITY, JR.

Thirty years ago the National Historic Preservation Conference was held in Savannah. It showcased a thirteen-year effort to rescue historic resources in the core of the city and gave the participants a new sense of purpose and a new understanding of what preservationists could accomplish at the local—grassroots—level.<sup>1</sup> Georgians came away from Savannah convinced that preservation progress across Georgia depended on the sharing of Savannah's successful lessons, as well as those from other efforts around the state and nation. Subsequently, the first statewide preservation conference was held in Athens barely six months after the Savannah meeting.<sup>2</sup> Stimulated by the success of the Athens and subsequent annual conferences, it was at the 1973 conference in Macon that the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation was created.<sup>3</sup> This development was critical to another concern realized shortly after the Savannah conference: the need for state enabling legislation for local preservation review commissions.

A month after the 1968 conference, the news broke that Savannah's approval of the referendum to create a preservation commission had been thwarted by the newly elected mayor. This occurred after the city had gone the tortuous route of securing permission from a somewhat conservative Georgia General Assembly. Savannah's process made Georgians painfully aware of the absence of state commission enabling legislation. The result, after almost a decade of debate,<sup>4</sup> was the introduction of legislation in 1976 and the eventual passage of the Georgia Historic Preservation Act of 1980.<sup>5</sup> This act established the state constitutional au-

<sup>1</sup>The 1968 conference organized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation highlighted the work of the Historic Savannah Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>The Athens conference was sponsored by a coalition of organizations and agencies that included the Georgia Conservancy, Georgia League of Historical Societies, Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation, Georgia Historical Commission, and the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design.

<sup>3</sup>In 1970 the statewide conference was held in Augusta; in Thomasville in 1971; in Columbus in 1972.

<sup>4</sup>This period encompassed the eventual adoption of an ordinance in Savannah in 1973 and the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1978 regarding the constitutionality of local landmark designation in a watershed decision, *Penn Central Transportation Co. v. New York City*, involving the Grand Central Terminal.

<sup>5</sup>The model legislation was drafted by the coauthor, John C. Waters, and Melvin B. Hill at the University of Georgia for the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation and introduced and shepherded through the State Planning and Community Affairs Committee of the Georgia House of Representatives by Dorothy Felton (R-Sandy Springs). This legislation became the first legislative advocacy project of the Georgia Trust under the directorship of Minette Bickel.

thority for local governments to enact preservation ordinances to create review commissions, and established an open procedural process and minimum operating standards for fair public hearings. It provided an option for regulating properties in a way that did not depend on a community's zoning authority. This was especially important because in the late 1970s only a few local governments in the state had meaningful zoning ordinances, most had not even considered zoning or had already openly rejected the idea.<sup>6</sup>

In 1980, only seven cities had preservation ordinances.<sup>7</sup> In this year when the state had just placed broad enabling legislation on the books, the National Historic Preservation Act was being amended to include a new Certified Local Government program for local government involvement in the National Preservation Program;<sup>8</sup> the Supreme Court's *Penn Central* decision, a recent bicentennial and stronger local governments made Georgia towns more interested in learning how to establish local preservation programs. Three pivotal conditions coincided to help accelerate the growth of commissions in Georgia in the 1980s:

1. The publishing of *Maintaining A Sense of Place: A Citizens Guide to Community Preservation*;<sup>9</sup>
2. The creative way in which Georgia's state historic preservation office guided efforts to create the state's CLG program;
3. The continued support and funding for a system of regional preservation planners, which was located at that time in the state's Area Planning and Development Commissions—currently called Regional Development Commissions, coordinated through the state historic preservation office.

Georgia was poised to “spread the gospel” that both preservation and planning can work best when federal, state and local governments are partners in resource protection. From the paltry seven review commissions in 1980 the growth was phenomenal. In 1981 there were 15; in 1989, 47; in 1992, 62 and in 1998, 86. National numbers grew, too. The following chart, from the United States Preservation Commission Identification Project, however, shows Georgia's rapid game of catch-up played with other East Coast states.

<sup>6</sup>*APDCs in Georgia Today* (Institute for Community and Area Development [ICAD], UGA, 1975).

<sup>7</sup>Savannah, Columbus-Muscogee County, Atlanta, Macon-Bibb County, St. Marys, Augusta and Valdosta had already passed local ordinances under special referenda, constitutional authority or within their local authority for zoning and other land-use laws.

<sup>8</sup>The 1980 amendments not only created the Certified Local Government program but renewed a national interest in setting up design review boards.

<sup>9</sup>Written by John C. Waters, and published by ICAD at the University of Georgia, this manual provides a step-by-step process for creating local preservation commissions under the new GHPA.

NUMBER OF STATE PRESERVATION COMMISSIONS AND CLGs

	1976	1981	1986	1988	1996	1998
Connecticut	38	51	73	74	24	25
Delaware	4	5	6	8	2	2
Florida	12	20	40	61	18	39
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>54</b>
Louisiana	3	5	15	41	9	35
Maine	1	5	18	18	7	8
Maryland	18	30	40	39	13	15
Massachusetts	59	84	141	142	17	21
New Hampshire	28	28	58	59	8	12
New Jersey	12	38	66	72	20	29
New York	22	45	132	136	22	38
North Carolina	20	44	73	80	29	34
Pennsylvania	29	47	74	74	19	22
Rhode Island	8	10	19	20	16	14
South Carolina	7	7	23	23	12	15
Vermont	6	9	24	25	7	8
Virginia	17	26	59	59	19	24

At long last preservation planning and the maintenance of community character has taken its place beside the other preservation programs that were instituted through decades of work by neighborhood activists, enlightened planning officials and insightful mayors and city councilmen. The CLG program, a manual for establishing local government participation in preservation, a creative state historic preservation office and a dedicated core of Georgia citizens made the creation of the Georgia Alliance of Preservation Commissions (GAPC) the next logical step. Modeled on programs in Maryland and New Hampshire, the GAPC became an active, vocal part of statewide preservation efforts. The newly coalesced group of local commissions and design review boards moved onto the scene and strengthened preservation efforts across the state. Georgia's mastery in training commissions, by linking them to an integrated community planning process<sup>10</sup> and targeting technical assistance to fledgling commissions, gave the state an opportunity of becoming the home of the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC).<sup>11</sup> Now the most extensive collection of information on commission operations, design review guidelines, and local board statistics is located in the NAPC offices at the University of Georgia.

<sup>10</sup>Georgia passed a comprehensive planning law in 1989. While preservation was listed as an "option" for communities to consider, many of them took that option and instituted local preservation programs based on a federal and state model of identification, registration and protection.

<sup>11</sup>The NAPC started as an organization associated with the MAHDC and is now based in Athens in the preservation program of the School of Environmental Design.

Due to a strong partnership among all players, Georgia has become a national leader in considering local planning as a key to preservation. There are stunning examples throughout the state of commissions addressing cutting-edge issues like computerization, working proactively with the Department of Transportation, creating historic affordable housing, making cultural diversity a preservation issue and training property managers to consider accessibility for persons with disabilities. This can be traced to a high level of local involvement in creating statewide preservation policy. All preservation is local. Georgia lives and breathes this notion.

Early preservation prognosticators, like Phinizy Spalding's projections in the 1979 *Quarterly* and the notions put forth in Savannah over thirty years ago, solidified an ethic of local planning and protection through design review commissions. The tradition continues and more Georgia communities are surveying historic resources, listing them in the National Register, adopting local preservation ordinances, developing design guidelines and making community revitalization a part of their comprehensive planning process more than ever before. This is no accident; this is no trend. It is bottom-line economics and up-front planning that make our cities and counties follow the advice of the early state preservationists.<sup>12</sup> A great deal of credit goes to the forward thinkers of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They have provided our state with the firmest of foundations on which to hang one of the nation's most successful local, state and federal preservation partnerships.

## HERITAGE TOURISM: TELLING THE REST OF THE STORY

BY ANNE FARRISEE

To a historian, "heritage tourism" almost sounds like an oxymoron. Tourism is big business, the second largest industry in Georgia behind agriculture. In 1997, \$16.5 billion was spent in Georgia by tourists, supporting almost 500,000 jobs.<sup>1</sup> A substantial number of these visitors participate in activities that involve history and/or traditional culture, what is now called "heritage tourism." Twenty years ago, the phrase was virtually unknown. People have always visited historic sites, but the last two decades have brought explosive growth in heritage tourism in Georgia, and

<sup>12</sup>The Georgia Economic Benefits studies of 1989 and the new, much acclaimed study conducted in 1997 have proven that preservation and revitalization pay.

<sup>1</sup>Davidson-Peterson Associates, Inc., *The Economic Impact of Expenditures by Tourists on Georgia Calendar Year 1997* (Georgia Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, Atlanta, 1998).